

Escambron Battery
San Juan, Puerto Rico

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

Historical American Building Survey
National Park Service
San Juan National Historic Site

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Owner: U. S. Navy Department

Date of
Erection: Between 1771 and 1801. Exact date not known. The battery was constructed on the site of an earlier fortification.

Builder: The Corps of Engineers of the Spanish Army.

Present
Condition: The remains of the battery are in a ruinous condition. There are no structural flaws or failures but all exposed surfaces have ^{been} dilapidated. Debris covers the pavement within the battery.

Vegetation on the walls occur throughout, except on the seaward side. All drains are clogged.

The battery used to be connected by walls to San Antonio Bastion on the Southeast tip of the San Juan Island, San Gerónimo Fort and San Gerónimo Powder House. They were demolished in sections between 1908 and 1938; the walls nearest the Escambrón battery in the 1930. Only a short spur is still in existence. It has disintegrated beyond repair.

A steel tower was built within the Battery during World War II. After the war it was dismounted but the foundations are still in existence.

Number of
Stories: The Battery has only one platform. It is between 6 and 12 feet above the surrounding ground level and is surrounded by a breast wall varying between 4 and 6 feet in height.

Materials
of Con-
struction: The fort is built on a sandstone bedrock. Its walls vary in width from 10' to 18'. It is constructed as shells with a rubble core. The shells taper from 2'6" - 3' at the bottom to 1'6" at the top and are constructed from cut sandstone blocks 18" x 32" x 24" laid in courses of faced field stones laid in irregular bond. Breast walls and old repairs have been made with rubble masonry in a lime mortar. Bricks are used for

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cornering of the breast walls, steps and walking surfaces. All surfaces were originally covered with stucco. In areas two layers are discernible. The top layer is a dark red stucco colored with a crushed tile aggregate. On the north side of the fort the original sandstone block masonry has been covered with a rubble facing varying from 6" to 12" in thickness.

Other Existing
Records:

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LIST OF PICTORICAL MATERIAL ON ESCAMBRON BATTERY

(The list is compiled from all material at the present available to the National Park Service, San Juan NHS)

- 1747 Mapa de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico, Francisco Fernández Valdelomar (Called Batería de Faxina.)
- 1851 Isla de Puerto Rico (Insert of San Juan) por el Teniente Coronel Capitán de Ingenieros Francisco Coello y Don Pascual Madóz.
- 1871 Plano de la zona de Extramuros de la Isla donde se halla asentada la ciudad de San Juan. Evaristo de Churrua.
- 1881 Plano de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico levantado por el cuerpo de ingenieros militares para el estudio de las nuevas defensas de la misma.
- 1887 Plano de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico levantado por el cuerpo de ingenieros militares para el estudio de las nuevas defensas de la misma.
- 1873 Plano de la ciudad de San Juan de Puerto Rico by the Chief of Engineers relating to the widening of the Plaza.

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Additional
Data:

BRIEF HISTORY

The old battery, fort or bastion of Escambrón was located at the northeastern tip of San Juan island adjacent to the present Escambrón beach. The nature of this fortified position cannot be ascertained from the available sources. It formed part of the First Line of Defense which at one time ran from Escambrón Point across the eastern end of the island of San Juan down to San Antonio Channel. During its long course of history the fortified position had a dual function: It complemented San Antonio and San Gerónimo Forts in the protection of the eastern water approaches to the city of San Juan, and prevented access by hostile ships to the Boquerón and the eastern end of the island.

In the report of Menéndez Valdés of 1587,¹ the Cabrón Cove² is mentioned as one of the most feasible landing places for an enemy attempting to invade San Juan, but states clearly that it was not fortified.

During Drake's attack of 1595 some sort of defense work existed in the Escambrón Cove. Both the "Morrillo" and Cabrón works, located at the eastward or shore³ end of San Juan fired at the English corsair. The

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"Cabron" was fortified with two pieces of ordnance and defended by 100 men under the command of Alonso de Vargas.⁴ Undoubtedly it was merely a temporary position, as were some of the other fortifications in that part of the city at that time.

In a modern chart found in Colbert's book,⁵ the fortifications existing in 1598, the Cabron or Goat Fort is shown, but its exact position is difficult to determine. There is no evidence that it fired at Cumberland in 1598.⁶

During the Dutch attack of 1625, Governor Juan de Haro, fearing an enemy landing in the eastern end of the island, ordered trenches to be dug at both the Boqueron and Escambron Cove and one cannon to be placed at each position.⁷

The puzzling fact is that no mention of a fort in the vicinity of Escambron Point is made in the available sources from 1625 until 1747, when it is called "Bateria de Faxina."⁸

In 1797, the major effort of the British military operations against San Juan was concentrated on the eastern defensive line, of which the Escambron position was a part. The Spaniards had provided the necessary

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means for defending the Escambrón Point, but it
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played no part in the armed conflict.

After the British attack, the Spaniards, fearing another invasion on a bigger scale, sought to strengthen all the fortifications of San Juan. In the Escambrón Battery alone, 6,463 pesos, 6 reales and 18 maravedies were spent. The work in this position is described in the following manner by Thomas Sedeño, a royal official: *

"From January 1, 1801, to June 30, the Escambrón Battery has been repaired totally, revesting the inside and outside with bare stone shaped with mortar... for lack of a cheaper method or durable material available in the island. The measurements of this Battery are as follows: in the inside, 96 'varas castellanas' in length; 3 varas and 2 feet in height, including the foundation; 2 feet thick. For the greatest economy the gun parapets have been constructed of masonry, measuring all of them (the parapets) 33 varas in length, each one 6 varas and 2 feet in width and 1 foot thick. The corresponding firing steps have been built also. In the outside the measurements are as follows: 124 varas in length, 3 varas height with foundation and 1 vara in thickness. The higher part of the parapet, which thickness is 5 varas and 2 feet, has been covered with a pile of minute rubble and inferior quality of mortar of 4 inches thick, and in this way the work is finished."

* Relación de Fortificación (Propiedad de R. W. Ramírez de Arellano).

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In a series of maps dated 1851,¹⁰ 1871,¹¹
1873,¹² 1881,¹³ and 1887¹⁴ the Escambrón fort,
bastion or fortified position is mentioned and shown,
but no description can be surmised.

The Escambrón Fort was one of the positions
modernized before the Spanish American War. It was
fortified with 3 howitzers of 24 cm. (9.4 in.).¹⁵

The present remains are part of the position
completed in 1780 at the time of the general expansion¹⁶
of the eastern defenses of the town.

"It was not apparently restored with the main
fortifications in 1938 but the main outline of its
works remains. The position rises to a considerable
height and has an excellent sweep of the surrounding
area. On the northern or sea side are two very broad
embrasures to allow coverage by two guns of a large
water area, and on the east or Channel side are two¹⁷
narrower embrasures."

* * * *

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1. Archivo General de Indias - Patronato 18, No. 13, R. O. 2.
2. "Cabrón" is the base of the word "Escambrón."

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3. Julian S. Corbett, Drake and the Tudor Navy. Longman's, Green, and Co., London, 1898, V. II, 419-420.
4. Edward A. Hoyt, A History of the Harbor Defenses of San Juan under Spain, 1509-1898, etc., San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1943, 144.
5. Julian S. Corbett, The Successors of Drake. Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1900, XIV, 243.
6. See diary of Governor de Castro in Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico, Fundador-Editor, Cayetano Coll y Toste. Imp. Cantero Fernández y Co., San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1914-1927, 14 vols. V, 40.-70. Will be cited as Boletín Histórico de P. R.
7. Hoyt, op. cit.; 61
8. "Mapa de la Plaza de Puerto Rico y sus contornos, etc." by Juan Francisco Valdelomar (Museo Naval, Madrid, Classif. O.-b.7-12).
9. Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico, 1, 180-198
10. "Isla de Puerto Rico," 1851, by Francisco Coello and Don Pascual Madoz. It is called Bateria.
11. "Plano de la zona extramuros de la isleta donde se halla asentada la Ciudad de San Juan de Puerto Rico comprendiendo el Caño de San Antonio, Ensenada de Miraflores y Manglares intermedios," 1871, by Evaristo de Churrua. It is called Bateria.
12. "Plano de la Ciudad de San Juan de Puerto Rico....," 1873, (General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington 25, D. C.).
13. "Plano de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico, levantado por el Cuerpo de Ingenieros Militares para el estudio de las nuevas defensas de la misma.
14. "Plano de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico levantado por el Cuerpo de Ingenieros Militares para el estudio de las nuevas defensas de la misma, 1881 (Servicio Geográfico del Ejercito, Madrid. Classif. J-4a-2a-b., Leggo 34.

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15. Angel Rivero, Crónica de la Guerra Hispano Americana en Puerto Rico, Madrid, 1922, 56.
16. Bureau of Public Works: Report relating to the ownership of land and buildings on the island which constitutes the principal part of the city of San Juan, Puerto Rico. (Type-written copy in the National Park Service Library). This is not a too reliable source.
17. Hoyt, op. cit; 150

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NOTE: The Brief History was prepared by the Historian (Park), San Juan National Historic Site. All other written data was prepared by the Architect, San Juan NHS.

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